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State of the City Mayor Kitty Piercy

Eugene 2012

Good evening. Thank you all for being here.

Thanks to City staff who organized this special event and who work daily to ensure high quality services for the people of Eugene. We are indeed fortunate.

I'm so pleased to have the Downing Street Singers from Churchill High School performing tonight. Let's give them a special round of applause to show our appreciation.

There are always events and changes in the city. How about that Rose Bowl and our Ducks? We're very proud. The icing on the cake is I won my wager with Mayor Soglin of Madison, Wisconsin and our local Habitat for Humanity program can expect \$500 worth of new tools.

As we celebrate the football team, let's take a moment to also acknowledge the leadership team at the University of Oregon. Richard Lariviere, 16th president of the University, was a terrific partner for the city. He has been much in my thoughts during this past month. The time he spent at the university made it better.

I am pleased to welcome interim president Bob Berdahl back to Eugene, a community that was his home for nearly 20 years when he taught at UO and served as dean. Bob agreed to come out of retirement while the search is on for a new university president. Bob Berdahl was the top official for the Association of American Universities, University of California-Berkeley, and University of Texas-Austin and he served as dean of the University of Oregon College of Arts and Sciences earlier in his career.

We value our town and gown partnership with the University of Oregon, and are pleased with its academic success and economic and cultural contributions to the Eugene community.

We also welcome new leaders in our community this year - Lane County Administrator Liane Richardson and Lane Transit District General Manager Ron Kilcoyne - and we wish them well.

This evening I'm going to speak very frankly with you about the current status of our city and how we will move forward. As you know, things aren't easy for a lot of people. Our task is to continue to be steady at the helm and focus on getting where we want to go.

I'd like to be here tonight telling you that things will be much better in 2012. But, in truth, the uncertain financial forecast continues to impact every government and every household. No matter what I read or who I listen to, the news isn't very good.

Congress appears to be immobilized and the recovery from the recession is predicted to be slow. Economists tell us that by 2020, we still will not be back to where we were before the recession. In Eugene our unemployment numbers (10.5%) may be slightly better than the nation (10.8%), the state (12.7%), or the county (12.8%), but they still are way too high.

We live in a state and county with shrinking revenues and growing needs. As the second largest city in the state of Oregon, much of the need and its impacts are ours to address. We simply have no choice but to help each other through these tough times.

It's up to us to keep our city moving.

They say when the going gets tough, the tough get going. That's what we have been doing and will continue to do. We've provided services and balanced our budget. We've been accountable. We've shrunk our footprint by tightening our belt, just like you. You can give big kudos to our City Council, City Manager Jon Ruiz and City staff for their extraordinary efforts on behalf of us all.

We've worked to keep our city safe, to protect and develop jobs, to build affordable housing, to keep our neighborhoods livable, our parks and library accessible, recreation and cultural activities available, our roads repaired, our water and air clean, and our social services intact. We know these services are particularly essential in these tough times. As an organization, we've made over \$20 million in cuts thus far and the end may not yet be in sight. We've been smart and innovative. We've done this with the help of many volunteers and partners. This is exactly what we'll have to continue to do together. I'm not saying it will be easy. I am saying it's the work of each and every one of us.

Let's take a moment to enjoy what we've gotten done since last year.

Our library earned one of the highest ratings in the country and usage has increased.

We had great cultural events like the Bach Festival and production of Wicked that attracted people from both far and near.

We've added to our Rivers to Ridges trail system.

We've made \$43 million in road repairs over the last three years. That's more repairs than ever in the history of Eugene, providing 495 well-paying jobs. We did that by supporting the gas tax and road bond. We worked together.

We have well over \$100 million in development occurring right now in our downtown. You can see it in the Broadway Commerce building (formerly Centre Court), the Woolworth building (formerly the Aster pit), the LCC Green Learning Center and 200 units of student housing (formerly the Sears pit), the Inn at 5th, the renovation of the Taco Time building and more to come. That's 450 construction jobs and 350 permanent jobs, even before counting the newest development. That took investing as a partner in these projects. To remove those pits took some real working together.

With our partners in Springfield, Lane County, Chambers of Commerce, Travel Lane County, Lane Metro Partnership, Lane Workforce Partnership, University of Oregon and Lane Community College, we developed a Regional Prosperity Plan. We know it's all about jobs, jobs, jobs.

This plan includes new University of Oregon business spin-offs (going from 2 to 17); business incubator opportunities being available; the Chamber of Commerce encouraging local financial investment; the cities and county providing small business loans and planning expertise to help

businesses stay and grow; and Lane Community College and Lane Workforce Partnership providing worker training and the development of a new virtual one-stop shop for business.

As Dave Hauser of the Chamber of Commerce recently stated, everyone is working harder together than at any time in memory to increase job opportunities in our area. We're better together.

There have been other notable areas of accomplishment in public safety, neighborhood livability, transportation gains, and social services.

We've kept our city safe.

This next year our police department will move into renovated, seismically appropriate facilities that will enable them to better meet the needs of the public every day and in unexpected emergencies.

I had the opportunity to serve on the Police Commission and to attend the Civilian Police Academy this year. This has given me a much more complete understanding of the breadth of services EPD provides and their commitment to apprehending criminals using the most advanced practices available. EPD takes great pride in providing our officers with considerably more training than the state requires. We see their work very positively reflected in the actual high level of public safety in Eugene.

Under Chief Pete Kern's able leadership, our city fostered good communications, cooperation and peacekeeping throughout the Occupy Eugene demonstrations and protests. We're proud of our police department for this accomplishment that prevented conflict and saved resources. And, as the camp was taken down, individual officers showed great compassion in helping some of our unhoused community members with their transitions, sending one individual home for Christmas and paying for a motel room for another. Working together for the well-being of everyone is a worthy city goal.

We take great pride in our excellent fire department and have carefully monitored the partial mergers of the Eugene and Springfield fire departments under Chief Randy Groves. This partial merger has thus far gone very well and to the apparent satisfaction of firefighters and the public from both cities. Chief Groves tells us we can expect \$876,239 in savings this fiscal year. Working together with Springfield helps us both.

We have improved neighborhood livability and Town and Gown relations.

Healthy neighborhoods are important to our way of life as a city. Neighborhood Services staff and volunteers do important work. There are new farmers markets spreading throughout the city and gardening efforts underway everywhere. There are emergency preparedness programs. There's keen interest in food security and food resilience. Neighborhood roads, bike access, bike racks and safe routes to school are improving. Close to campus, neighborhoods and the University are working together to maintain neighborhood character, to reduce student housing impacts, and to ensure that our older Eugene neighborhoods survive and thrive well into the future. Parks are being adopted and new water features invite kids to play. Working hand in hand with our neighborhoods ensures a good future for Eugene.

Transportation gains have been made.

I've told you about the amazing number of road repairs that have been completed. That story is incomplete without telling you that there's still a substantial backlog. It is likely we'll be asking you to support another road bond in the future. We've gone about this work in the right way, informing the public of the list of roads to be fixed and putting in place a community oversight committee to

monitor that the dollars are spent the way they were intended. With construction costs down we've been able to add additional roads to the list for repair. Our public works department has gotten an amazing amount of work done but it's your votes that made it possible.

Lane Transit District has completed two very successful segments of our bus rapid transit system. The third segment has been going through a required federal environmental analysis and we are beginning to assess, with Springfield, a fourth segment linking Lane Community College. With 200 new housing units and the new downtown LCC Green Learning Center, this connection would just seem to make good sense. Both communities benefit from a robust transit system.

State transportation dollars are scarce and, thus, much attention is being paid to preservation, connectivity and multi-modal capacity. Our city bike and pedestrian plan envisions making it easier for people to walk and cycle. There's strong interest in developing bike lanes that are completely separated from traffic so that all riders can feel safer moving around the community.

In Envision Eugene, transportation corridors are planned that support mixed-use development so that people travel less and carbon emissions can be reduced. Just this week we've seen plans emerging along West 11th for such development in the Rexius mixed-use proposal.

The Department of Land Conservation and Development's Citizen Involvement Advisory Committee (CIAC) recently awarded the Envision Eugene planning process the STAR Award, the state's highest honor for citizen involvement in land use. Our city planners have led this amazing effort.

Our climate and energy plan responds to peak oil, finite resources, and climate change. It came about as a result of community work and its implementation requires a lot of action by each and every one of us. This plan, as well as our staff lead, Matt McCrea, were recognized at both the state and national levels.

All our transportation/land use-planning documents are being updated to reflect our community goals and the concrete steps we need to achieve them. These include accessible and attractive transportation choices that reduce carbon emissions, set us on the path to the future, and continue to keep our road infrastructure safe and efficient for all modes to move people and goods. Our Sustainability Commission has been active in leading in these efforts. Again, we depend on our community and all our volunteers to work on plans that ensure the best outcome for Eugene.

We are part of the Cascade Rail Corridor that extends all the way to British Columbia. When President Obama invested substantial resources in higher speed rail, Oregon wasn't prepared and received little of the money. We need efficient, frequent and reliable passenger and freight rail in this state. That is both north and south, east and west. I'm co-chairing the state committee to improve our rail line between here and Portland. We'll be ready to go when funding opportunities come our way again. In terms of economic opportunity, this is a big issue for our state and region. Improved rail provides jobs in building, servicing, in products, and in support businesses such as intermodal distribution centers. This is an exciting possibility that requires us to work together as a region to position ourselves for economic advantage.

Strong social services remain critical to our community.

Eugene continued to build a stock of affordable housing with its partners. This year, our city manager led an effort to rebuild some foreclosed housing to help returning veterans. We supported social services, the Buckley House and an additional Cahoots vehicle. A council subcommittee has

examined the growing social service needs in our community and will be making recommendations to the council.

The council responded to Occupy Eugene's focus on unhoused members of our community by adding camping sites, working on providing wet beds and setting up a task force to make recommendations for how to better provide additional services for the homeless. There's much need for innovative solutions and I'm confident they can be found when we all work together.

Our goal is to be a human rights city, a city that is safe, inclusive, just and hospitable to all. The Human Rights Commission has done a great job of listening to community members regarding community needs and this information will help guide us to a stronger, better community - one that is in keeping with our values.

Our future begins now.

I have spoken to you about the work of the city, and our many challenges and successes. This is a special place, where community members are compassionate and give generously of their time and energy. We have a lot to build on, a lot of friends and colleagues, a lot of natural wealth, a lot of innovative and exciting entrepreneurs, and a lot of possibilities.

We must step beyond the national political rancor, step beyond the confines of difficulty and pettiness, to stay focused on having a community that's good for all of us - left, right and all points in between. That's what I've been personally and steadily working toward.

We must offer a hand to help a neighbor.

We must offer a hand to someone who is without any hope.

We must be smart but generous, kind but accountable, and work to prepare our children, to create jobs, and to be certain our community is prepared for the future. We can do this.

We must be bold, focused and steady at the helm.

We aren't just any community. We'll be celebrating our 150th birthday. We'll be hosting the Olympic Track and Field Trials. We're on the move. We are Eugene.